



## Preparing for Third Molar Removal

*This information was prepared by the staff of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Pain Research Clinic to acquaint you with what to expect during third molar (wisdom tooth) removal. This material will explain what researchers can learn from this procedure and will give you advice on how to take care of yourself after surgery. If you have any questions about this procedure, please feel free to ask the clinic staff. We will be happy to speak with you.*

### The Pain Research Clinic

Pain is the most common symptom for which people seek dental or medical care. It is also one of the most difficult conditions to understand and treat. To address this problem, NIH organized the NIH Pain Research Clinic, the country's first pain clinic devoted exclusively to research. This clinic is directed by the National Institute of Dental Research which has had a longstanding interest in pain.

The NIH Pain Research Clinic is a joint effort between researchers and dental, medical, and nursing professionals who work together to find new ways to assess, diagnose, and treat pain.

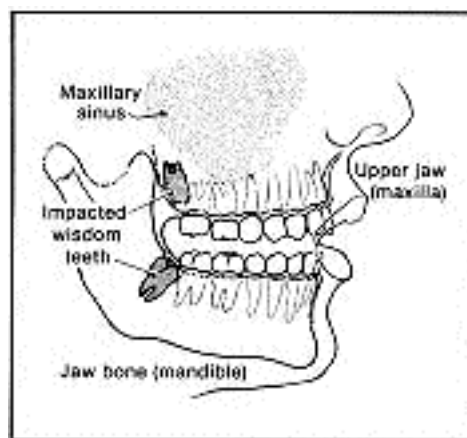
### Reasons for removing third molars

Third molars are usually removed when they are impacted. Teeth are impacted when there is not enough room for them in the mouth. Removal should take place before the surrounding jaw bone has hardened and before any major changes have taken place in the jaw.

Other reasons why third molars would be removed are the following:

- recurrent infections or cysts around the tooth that cause bone loss and weakening of the jaw bone
- third molars causing damage to an adjacent tooth
- third molars crowding other teeth, causing them to shift out of line.

Third molars are usually removed before people reach the age of thirty.



Impacted Wisdom Teeth

### What can be learned from third molar removal?

Having third molars removed is more than just a minor operation. When performed at the Pain Research Clinic, this relatively simple procedure yields a wealth of information about the effects of surgery on the body. Scientists use the extraction of wisdom teeth as a model for studying pain because it is applicable to the kind of pain that results from surgery on other parts of the body.

Since they are usually healthy, people undergoing third molar removal are good candidates for pain studies. Before surgery, these people feel anxiety similar to all those scheduled for surgery. During the operation, researchers can measure the effect of stress caused by surgery. After the operation, various drugs can be given to find out which works best to reduce post-operative pain. The details of the study in which you will participate will be explained when you are first seen in the clinic.

### **Directions to the Pain Research Clinic**

Located in Bethesda, Maryland, NIH is just inside the Capital Beltway (Interstate 495). If you are driving to NIH, you can take exit 36 (south) onto Old Georgetown Road. When you are on Old Georgetown Road, continue for 2 miles until you see the firehouse on your left. Turn left onto Center Drive, the first entrance into the NIH campus. Proceed on Center Drive past the Clinical Center, a large red brick and glass building. Continue onto Memorial Road and into the Clinical Center garage. Stop at the booth and inform the attendant that you have an appointment at the Pain Research Clinic. You will then be able to park. Once you have parked, take the elevator to the first floor of the Clinical Center. Go to the admissions section to obtain the necessary paperwork before you proceed to the clinic.

If you are taking the Metro, get off at the Medical Center stop on the red line and proceed north to Center Drive. Follow Center Drive as it curves west towards the Clinical Center. A landmark that may help orient you will be Building 31 which you will pass on your right as you walk towards the Clinical Center. Continue on Center Drive until you see the red brick and glass building which is the Clinical Center. Walk through the glass sliding doors and go to the admissions section located ahead towards your right.

### **Your initial evaluation**

When you have completed the admissions process, take your chart and proceed to the Dental Clinic to have a dental x-ray taken. If you are sure that your dentist has already sent in a panoramic radiograph (an x-ray of the teeth on your upper and lower jaws) you may go directly to the third floor clinic.

After your x-ray has been taken, bring it with your chart when you go to the third floor clinic. Check in with the receptionist and wait until another staff member comes to talk with you. While you are waiting, complete the forms that the receptionist gives you. Please complete the medical history form accurately. Please tell the staff if you have been exposed to AIDS or are engaged in any high-risk activities for HIV exposure. If you are not sure of some answers, please discuss your questions with the nurse or dentist who will see you shortly.

When the nurse or dentist comes out to greet you, you will be taken back to an examination room where your medical history will be reviewed, and the surgery and research study will be explained. If you are unable to keep this initial evaluation appointment, please call us in advance at 496-5483.

### **Complications from surgery**

As with any operation, complications are possible during third molar removal. These complications include delayed healing of the extraction site (dry socket), infection, perforation of the lining of the sinuses located in the upper jaw, damage to the teeth, or temporarily or permanently altered sensation of the lower lip, chin, or tongue.

A rare complication of oral surgery is a fractured jaw. There may also be side effects from the local anesthetic used during surgery. Possible, though rare, adverse reactions include

temporary facial paralysis, a bruise, injection into a vein, and allergic reactions.

Some patients have experienced one or more of the following transient adverse effects from the pain medication used after surgery: drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and allergic reactions.

### **Things to remember before surgery**

- Do not eat or drink anything after midnight of the night before surgery. This is a very important rule to follow. If you eat or drink before surgery, your surgery will be cancelled because serious complications could result.
- After surgery, you will remain in the clinic for 2 to 6 hours. The exact time will vary depending on the study in which you take part.

### **Things to remember for the day of surgery**

- Report directly to the third floor clinic at the time scheduled for you. When you have signed in at the reception desk, you will be seen by your primary nurse. Your primary nurse will take care of you from preoperative preparation to discharge after your surgery.
- Please bring any medication you are currently taking.
- If possible, wear short sleeves.
- After surgery, you will remain in the clinic for 2 to 6 hours. The exact time will vary depending on the study in which you take part.
- An adult must be available both to pick you up in the clinic after surgery and to drive you home when you are discharged from the clinic.

### **Events on the day of surgery**

#### ***Before surgery***

Your primary nurse will ask you some routine questions and take your vital signs (tempera-

ture, pulse, respiration rate, blood pressure). If you have any questions or concerns about your surgery, please ask them at that time.

You will be taken to one of the operatories where the surgery will be performed. An I.V. (intravenous) line will be placed in your arm. This device will enable the staff to obtain blood samples and administer medications without having to give you many needle sticks. The I.V. will remain in place after surgery or until the necessary blood samples have been drawn.

#### ***After surgery and throughout the day***

After surgery, you should plan to rest at home for the remainder of the day. If you have been given a sedative, lie down at home until it has completely worn off. Reading, watching television, and taking a nap are examples of quiet activities that you may enjoy until bedtime.

The sedative that you received during surgery, as well as certain medicines, may cause drowsiness and dizziness after the operation. Because of these effects, do not drive a car, operate machinery, drink alcoholic beverages, or expose yourself to safety hazards.

Proper mouth care after oral surgery will speed healing and reduce complications. The following suggestions are offered to help you recover quickly and safely from oral surgery.

#### ***Bleeding***

Expect some bleeding to occur: oozing may continue for 24 hours. To help stop the bleeding, gently bite on folded gauze for an hour as needed during the first 24 hours. If bleeding has not subsided after 24 hours, contact the clinic. So that bleeding does not worsen, engage in nonstrenuous, quiet activities.

### *Protecting the blood clot*

- Do not rinse, spit, brush your teeth, or use a mouthwash.
- Do not exercise strenuously for 7 to 10 days after surgery.
- Do not pick at the surgical site.
- Do not use a straw.
- Do not use a Water Pik.
- Do not drink alcoholic or carbonated beverages.
- If you smoke, do not do so for 24 hours or longer.
- Do not chew tobacco for 1 week.

Smoking or chewing tobacco will greatly increase your postoperative problems.

### *Swelling*

Expect swelling, especially if your surgery was difficult. You may even see some bruising on your cheek. Use ice bags immediately and for the next 24 hours. Apply them at regular intervals: put the ice bags on for 30 minutes and take them off for 15 minutes. If you had teeth removed on both sides, alternate a single ice pack from side to side every 15 minutes. Keep your head elevated on two or three pillows while you rest or sleep. The swelling will peak in 2 to 3 days and should subside after that. If you notice any increase in swelling after the first 48 hours, a fever, a bad taste in your mouth, or pus, you may have an infection. Call the clinic and arrange to be seen that day.

### *Pain*

After oral surgery, you may feel some discomfort. It can be eased by taking pain medications as directed. Take the first dose of medication when your lower lip begins to tingle or when you begin to feel pain. Take your next dose 4 to 6 hours later as prescribed. By taking your medication every 4 to 6 hours as prescribed, you will be able to stay ahead of your pain. Stomach discomfort can be avoided by eating before you take the pain medication.

### *Eating*

It is very important to eat and drink enough after oral surgery. The first day, eat such cool, soft foods as instant breakfasts, milkshakes, yogurt, and applesauce. The next day, advance to semisoft foods when you can tolerate them. Avoid tough, hard, chewy, hot, and spicy foods.

### **The day after and the week following surgery**

These guidelines will help you continue your recovery.

### *Ice bags*

If circumstances permit, continue using ice bags the morning after surgery. Do not use them for a longer period.

### *Heat*

Starting 24 hours after surgery, apply warm, moist heat to the outside of your face several times daily for 2 to 3 days.

### *Oral hygiene*

Brush your teeth as best you can after meals and at bed-time. Rinse your mouth with warm salt water (1/2 teaspoon table salt in an 8-ounce glass of warm water) every 2 hours and after meals. Brushing and rinsing will help maintain oral hygiene and prevent infections.

### *Food*

Return to your normal diet as soon as you can. While you may have some stiffness in your jaws for several days, chewing will help loosen your jaw muscles.

### *Medications*

Continue taking your pain medications as prescribed. Since the pain should begin to diminish after 2 days, take pain medication only when needed.

*Note: Certain medications may cause sleepiness and dizziness. DO NOT operate machin-*

*ery, drive a car, drink alcohol, or expose yourself to safety hazards. If you feel an increase in pain after 3 or 4 days, call the clinic.*

### **Blood**

If you see any blood in nasal secretions or after blowing your nose, call the clinic.

### **Injection site**

If medication was given to you through your vein and you have redness, pain, irritation, or hardness at the injection site, wrap the area with a warm, moist towel and call the clinic for further instructions.

### **Stitches**

- ☐ Stitches were used. You must keep your appointment to have them removed.  
*date:*                      *time:*
- ☐ You have dissolvable stitches. They will dissolve in 3 to 14 days. You do not have to return to the clinic to have these stitches removed.
- ☐ No stitches were used.

If you have any questions or problems, please do not hesitate to call the clinic at 496-5483 or 496-6695. After 4:30 p.m. and on weekends, call the NIH operator at 496-9310 and ask for the Pain Research Clinic dentist on call.

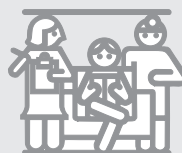
### **Your initial appointment is scheduled for:**

*Date:*

*Time:*

Please go to the admissions section first, then go to the Dental Clinic for an x-ray. After the x-ray has been taken, proceed to the Pain Research Clinic on the 3rd floor.

**YOU WILL NOT HAVE YOUR TEETH  
REMOVED AT THE FIRST VISIT**



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This information is prepared specifically for patients participating in clinical research at the Warren Grant Magnuson Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health and is not necessarily applicable to individuals who are patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your healthcare team.

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